



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

*SEJANUS*, by Ben Jonson, edited by W. D. Briggs. Boston, D. C. Heath and Company, 1911.

The edition of *Sejanus* by Prof. Briggs in the Belles-Lettres Series presents to us another of Jonson's plays with modern editing. The significance of Jonson's work for both the Renaissance and the classical period renders every new and careful edition of any of his plays very welcome, and Prof. Briggs's *Sejanus* is an accomplishment of broad scope, showing earnest workmanship.

The text is based on the Folio of 1616, with variant readings from the Quarto and from modern editors. Prof. Briggs's variations from the Folio in such matters as the use of certain letters, punctuation, and some points of form prevent the text from being so nearly a reprint as modern editions of Elizabethan works often are, but these changes do not in general affect the value of the edition even for the scholar. The annotation of the play is a matter of greater interest. Jonson himself has left us a mass of references to passages from historians and satirists which he used in building a play that was to represent with entire truth not only the salient events of Sejanus's career but also the social conditions of a corrupt Rome, with the ambition and the criminal indulgence of those in power, and the servility of their parasites and of the masses in general. To trace and verify these references and to publish in notes all the important passages among them was the task needed to furnish modern students material for an understanding of Jonson's workmanship. It is here that Prof. Briggs's scholarship reveals itself at the best. Not only has he followed up Jonson's own source notes but he has added a number which indicate still more fully the range of our dramatist's classical lore. It is now possible, without the extremely laborious task of tracing Jonson's references, to judge of his learning as shown in *Sejanus*, his devotion to the classics, his art and literary methods, his didactic purpose and serious outlook—in short, his place in the late Renaissance. Probably the classical passages reflected in the play have not all been found yet. Indeed, he would be a hardy editor who could hope to exhaust the classical borrowings of Jonson, even with the author's help. But the possibility of future discoveries does not make Prof. Briggs's annotation less admirable. If some objections might be mentioned, they are minor ones. Thus I feel that the note on Hugh Holland, who wrote complimentary verses on *Sejanus*, might be more significant if attention were called to the fact that Jonson wrote similar verses for Holland's *Pancharis* in 1603. But there is little opportunity to cavil at this part of the work.

The introduction dealing with Jonson as a writer of tragedy shows Prof. Briggs's intimate acquaintance with Jonson's ideals and his art. I must confess to some disappointment, however, in the general point of view chosen, that of Jonson's failure to measure up to our present ideals of great tragedy. *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, we must admit, are interesting to this generation chiefly as documents for the student of literary history. Why this is true, Prof. Briggs has adequately explained, but he has not accounted sufficiently, it seems to me, for the fact that Jonson's tragedies were read with appreciation by the scholarly and the cultured for two centuries. To my mind, for the present day student the key to an understanding of Jonson's art lies in the historical point of view. Jonson's tragedy must be approached primarily from the basis of ideals of tragedy in his day. To measure him by the rod of modern critical ideals seems beside the mark, so different were his aims. The scrupulous didacticism of his work Prof. Briggs has stressed as expressing a fundamental tenet of Elizabethan criticism. Further, seventeenth century humanists and classicists demanded rationality in literature, condemned imaginative and impressional art—which Jonson probably essayed in *The Spanish Tragedy* but would not father, as Prof. Briggs suggests. That Jonson, even toward the close of his career, was capable of a delicately romantic and highly imaginative art *The Sad Shepherd* proves beyond doubt. But he could hardly have made *Sejanus* less philosophical, less scientific, and retained his place as leader among literary men who insisted on the didactic and the rational. Moreover, with the humanists' insistence on decorum, even if Jonson had not developed his own rigid idea of humours, there would have been no place in the work of so genuine a humanist for the play of complex individuality which we consider essential in character portrayal and which Prof. Briggs demands of Jonson. Jonson bent the whole weight of his learning and his genius toward building up a type of drama that was close akin to satire. His early comedies he called "comical satires", but the finest specimens of his satirical dramas are his tragedies and *Volpone*, a comedy which, as Prof. Briggs points out, is essentially like *Sejanus*. It is as specimens of satiric poetry in which philosophy and reason are deliberately exalted above imagination and emotion that Jonson's plays are most significant for the later development of English literature. Prof. Briggs of course recognizes all of this. In fact, he points out that Renaissance tragedy shared the faults of Jonson's tragedy and that these faults rested on critical principles of the

day. I do not mean to imply, indeed, that Prof. Briggs's treatment is entirely inconsistent with the historical treatment. My regret is merely that the historical point of view has been obscured.

C. R. BASKERVILL.

*University of Chicago.*

---

*THE COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE, A STUDY IN ITALIAN  
POPULAR COMEDY, BY WINIFRED SMITH.  
STUDIES IN ENGLISH AND COMPARATIVE LIT-  
ERATURE. NEW YORK. THE COLUMBIA UNI-  
VERSITY PRESS, 1912 IN 8°XV—290 PAGES.*

The book is a timely one, since the 'Commedia dell'Arte' has thus far had scant attention from English scholars, in spite of its connection with English drama. The greater part of the material is not new, having been drawn from the various Italian and French works, which treat the subject in more detail. However, the chapter devoted to the 'Commedia dell'Arte' influence in England, is an original contribution in the main, and together with an appendix of English plays revealing Italian motifs, indicates fresh and thorough investigation on the writer's part. No little skill is shown in choosing and presenting the striking aspects of the 'Commedia dell'Arte', so that a distinct impression of the genre may be gained even by the least initiated. The treatment of the various character-types, the inclusion of effective extracts and of summaries of the most important scenarios, all make for an interesting exposition of the subject. It is perhaps to be regretted that some one of the more important scenarios was not included entire, so that the reader might realize fully the slender basis upon which the actors worked. It is these very illuminating chapters, however, which give the book its somewhat too popular character, although that character is suggested throughout by the style, which should perhaps be more impersonal or more colourless, for so technical a subject.

The Table of Contents by no means does justice to the amount of material in the book, yet it would be almost impossible to give adequate clues, because in almost any one chapter, the mass of detail is too heterogeneous to be subordinated clearly to the subject in hand. The heaping-up of comparatively extraneous information frequently destroys the effectiveness of the argument involved, and confuses the main line of thought, which is sufficiently interesting in itself to be allowed clear passage.